

Amendments to the Claims:

The following listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (Currently Amended) A lead-free piezoelectric ceramic composition wherein Cu is contained in the form of a solid solution in a crystal structure or at a grain boundary of a perovskite compound of a non-stoichiometric composition represented by a formula $(K_xA_{1-x})_y(Nb_{1-z}B_z)O_3$, wherein “A” represents at least one of Na and Bi, while “B” represents at least one of Ta and Ti, and wherein $0 < x \leq 1$, $0 < y < 1$, and $0 \leq z \leq 1$.
2. (Original) The lead-free piezoelectric ceramic composition according to claim 1, wherein 0.2-1.0 at.% of Cu is contained in 100 at.% of said perovskite compound.
3. (Original) The lead-free piezoelectric ceramic composition according to claim 2, wherein at least 0.4 at.% of Cu is contained in 100 at.% of said perovskite compound.
4. (Original) The lead-free piezoelectric ceramic composition according to claim 2, wherein no more than 0.8 at.% of Cu is contained in 100 at.% of said perovskite compound.
5. (Original) The lead-free piezoelectric ceramic composition according to claim 1, wherein a value “y” in said formula is at least 0.9.
6. (Original) The lead-free piezoelectric ceramic composition according to claim 5, wherein said value “y” is less than 0.99.
7. (Original) The lead-free piezoelectric ceramic composition according to claim 1, wherein at least 0.2 at.% of Cu is contained in 100 at.% of said perovskite compound, and a value “y” in said formula of said perovskite compound is less than 0.99.

8. (Original) The lead-free piezoelectric ceramic composition according to claim 1, wherein a value "z" in said formula of said perovskite compound is no more than 0.4.

9. (Currently Amended) The lead-free piezoelectric ceramic composition according to claim 1, wherein Cu is contained in said perovskite compound, in the form of at least one of compounds $K_aCu_bNb_eO_d$, $K_eCu_fTa_gO_h$ and $K_iCu_jTi_kO_l$, wherein "a" through "l" are arbitrary numerical values $K_4CuNb_8O_{23}$, $K_5Cu_2Nb_{11}O_{30}$ and $K_{5.4}Cu_{1.3}Ta_{10}O_{29}$.

10. (Original) The lead-free piezoelectric ceramic composition according to claim 1, wherein a value "x" in said formula of said perovskite compound is equal to 0.5.

11. (Currently Amended) A process of preparing a lead-free piezoelectric ceramic composition, comprising the steps of:

preparing a starting composition including, as a primary component, a perovskite compound represented by a formula $(K_xA_{1-x})(Nb_{1-z}B_z)O_3$, wherein "A" represents at least one of Na and Bi, while "B" represents at least one of Ta and Ti, and wherein $0 < x \leq 1$, and $0 \leq z \leq 1$, and as a secondary component, at least one of compounds $K_aCu_bNb_eO_d$, $K_eCu_fTa_gO_h$ and $K_iCu_jTi_kO_l$, wherein "a" through "l" are arbitrary numerical values $K_4CuNb_8O_{23}$, $K_5Cu_2Nb_{11}O_{30}$ and $K_{5.4}Cu_{1.3}Ta_{10}O_{29}$; and

subjecting said starting composition to a firing treatment.

12. (Canceled)

13. (Currently Amended) The process according to claim 12 15, wherein said second starting material is CuO.

14. (Canceled)

15. (New) A process of preparing a lead-free piezoelectric ceramic composition, comprising the steps of:

preparing a mixture consisting of a first starting material in the form of a perovskite compound of a non-stoichiometric composition represented by a formula $(K_xA_{1-x})_y(Nb_{1-z}B_z)O_3$, wherein "A" represents at least one of Na and Bi, while "B" represents at least one of Ta and Ti, and wherein $0 < x \leq 1$, $0 < y < 1$, and $0 \leq z \leq 1$, and a second starting material serving as a source of Cu; and

calcining said mixture.

16. (New) The process according to claim 15, wherein $0.9 < y < 1$, and $0 \leq z \leq 0.4$.